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SENSITIVE

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [CA](#)
SUBJECT: CANADIAN ELECTION SPECULATION HITS FEVER PITCH

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Prime Minister Harper decided on August 26 to keep Governor General Michaelle Jean in Ottawa through early September. Local media and commentators interpret the move as the clearest sign yet that Harper may soon call an autumn snap election. If Harper does make the announcement in early September, Election Day could be October 14 or October 20, according to our contacts. End summary.

¶2. (U) Under Canada's Constitution the Governor General, acting on the advice of the Prime Minister, has the authority to dissolve Parliament and order elections. The Prime Minister must formally request a dissolution and election. In practice, the Governor General accedes to the Prime Minister's request and his recommended date for new elections. The two must meet face-to-face for the dissolution interview, however, suggesting a possible motive for the Governor General's truncated international travel plans, according to our contacts and media reports.

KEEPING ALL OPTIONS OPEN

¶3. (U) On August 22, the Prime Minister had announced that Governor General Michaelle Jean would lead Canada's delegation to the Paralympic Games in Beijing. The trip would mean she would be out of the country from September 4 to 10. However, barely four days later, on the evening of August 26, the Governor General's spokesperson announced that the Prime Minister had asked the Governor General to cancel the trip "because of the current political uncertainty." The Prime Minister's press secretary denied an announcement was imminent and said only that it was "prudent" to ask the Governor General to stay in Canada. The schedule change bolsters media reports that PM Harper may call a snap election in the first week of September for a possible Election Day on October 14 or 20. Observers see the development as the clearest sign yet that Harper may not wait to be defeated in Parliament after the House of Commons returns on September 15.

COMMENT

¶4. (SBU) Officially, Prime Minister Harper says that he will make a decision whether to call an election "in the next few weeks," but his insistence that the "the country must have a government that can function" and the change in the Governor General's plans, strongly suggest that he has already made up his mind in favor of a snap election call. The change also illustrates the fluidity of the present situation and the speed with which events are moving. Harper seems motivated to control the timing of the election and he would clearly prefer to trigger it on his own terms rather than wait for the opposition parties to defeat him in Parliament after September 15. Harper appears to be reserving maximum flexibility on timing, and ensuring the availability of the Governor General in Canada is a crucial precaution to that end. End comment
WILKINS